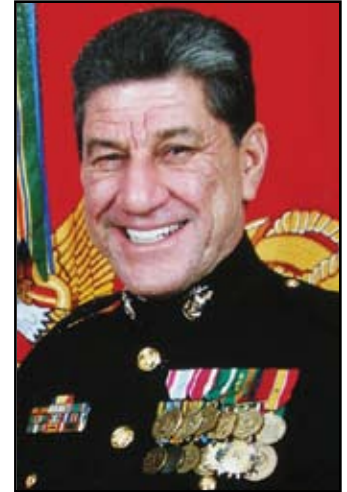




*Retired Marine Corps major and disabled veteran William R. Mimiaga teaches young people at William Logan Stephens Middle School in Long Beach, Calif.*

*William R. Mimiaga as a U.S. Marine Corps major prior to his retirement in 1994. Mimiaga was named the 2006 Middle School Teacher of the Year by the California Troops to Teachers Program.*



# TROOPS TO TEACHERS

By Jim Hall

**T**he motorcycle growls to a stop in the lane next to you waiting for the light to turn green. You glance left. The man straddling the bike is square-jawed, weathered-looking, and his short cropped black hair is streaked with grey. He isn't huge, but he is square shouldered and appears solid.

At first glance, you might think him a longshoreman at the nearby Long Beach Docks, or possibly a former boxer or football player, or a retired noncom from one of the Marine Corps bases farther south along the Southern California coast.

The man is actually William R. Mimiaga (a.k.a. Monsoon, Baseball Bill, Gunny Mims, Wild William and Bill), a disabled veteran and retired U.S. Marine Corps major with 31 years of service. He is also one of the most enthusiastic and outstanding teachers in the state of California.

After being nominated the second time by Diane Brown the principal at William Logan Stephens Middle School,

part of the Long Beach Unified School District, in Long Beach, Calif., Mimiaga was honored in a special ceremony in San Diego as the California Troops to Teachers Middle School Teacher of the Year on April 29, 2006.

Introduced through the Defense Authorization Bill in 1993, Troops to Teachers is a U.S. Department of Education and Department of Defense program helping eligible military personnel begin a new career as teachers in public schools where their skills, knowledge and experience are most needed. Troops to Teachers provides referral assistance and placement services to interested military personnel and veterans. The program is managed by the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES). The DANTES Troops to Teachers office helps applicants identify teacher certification requirements, programs leading to certification and employment opportunities.

Few meet the criteria of being military personnel more than Mimiaga. He

enlisted in the Marine Corps as a private in 1964 and retired wearing the golden oak leaves of a Marine Corps major 31 years later. His career included two combat tours in Vietnam that included a combat promotion to staff sergeant, a stint as a drill instructor that earned him a promotion to gunnery sergeant and other tours of duty throughout the world, including Southwest Asia in preparation and execution of Desert Shield and Desert Storm. In 1975, he was selected, attended special training and became a warrant officer. In 1978, he was promoted to first lieutenant as a Transportation Limited Duty Officer (LDO (T)), better known affectionately as a "Mustanger."

The Mustanger would have probably never shed his uniform had arthritis not caught up with him. When his knees went, so did his career. But, it's hard to keep a Mustanger down.

Mimiaga is a life member of DAV Chapter 23 in Long Beach and numerous other organizations. He knows well

how much others benefit from the community service such organizations provide. That, coupled with his career of training, teaching, counseling and leading young Marines, has left him determined to help others.

Some of the Marines he served with did not survive the Vietnam War. Many were undereducated and came from broken homes and poverty. Mimiaga wanted their children to have a better chance.

"I served with good people who sacrificed so much for our country," Mimiaga said. "I promised myself I would find a way to help them some day. What better way than to help their kids and the kids some of them would never have a chance to have? Teaching lets me do that."

When he learned about Troops to Teachers Mimiaga saw a way to keep his promise, and he set to the task.

Eligibility for the Troops to Teachers program is open to a variety of retired, separated, active duty and transitioning military members and veterans, including disabled veterans.

Troops to Teachers requires a bachelor's or advanced degree when applying for elementary and secondary education positions. And vocational or technical education teaching positions require an associate's degree or at least one year of college and six years of work experience in a technical or vocational field. The program also requires the last period of military service to be honorable.

Mimiaga used his GI benefits to earn a bachelor and master's degrees, and he came with several footlockers jammed full of life experiences. The California Troops to Teachers program counseled and placed him at Stephens Middle School as a special education teacher. His students are the hard cases, the disruptive ones, kids from broken homes and gangs, kids with emotional challenges and short tempers—younger, but not too far removed from some of the recruits Mimiaga trained to be Marines. To Mimiaga they are kids ready to learn, and he is ready to take on all the "whys" they can throw at him, because answering the "whys" is when the teaching begins.

Armed with enthusiasm, knowledge, determination and a huge smile, Mimiaga traded in his camouflage uniform for a sport coat and tie, and his rifle for a projector and pointer, and started teaching. He hasn't slowed down since.

With seven percent of the nation's teaching force leaving the profession every year, highly qualified teachers are needed and specific kinds of teachers are especially needed. There is a need for more male teachers, teachers for inner city schools, special education, mathematics and science teachers, and culturally diverse teachers. The Troops to Teachers program is meeting this need with teachers like Mimiaga.

Being disabled is no drawback to being a good

teacher as far as Mimiaga is concerned.

"Disabled veterans walk the walk," Mimiaga said. "They have met the challenges of recuperation and lead meaningful lives. What better example to teach and lead children into a successful future.

"Think of disabled veterans' life experiences. They can transform those life experiences into meaningful teaching tools in the classroom. That's the way you win hearts and imaginations. It's a win-win for veterans, children and the community.

"That's part of why being a teacher is such a great job."

Coming to teaching may seem a bit unusual for a toughened former Marine, and at 61 golfing in the afternoon might seem more the menu than a sixth, seventh or eighth grade classroom of energetic young people constantly ready to challenge your abilities.

But for Mimiaga, teaching is more or less a family tradition. His mother worked for the Head Start Program for 35 years, his brother was a sociology professor at the University of Colorado and two of his sisters were teachers. So, after teaching troops for 31 years, it was a natural transition to teaching children for Mimiaga.

If you think teaching might be a "great job" for you, check out their Web site [www.proudtoserveagain.com](http://www.proudtoserveagain.com). You can also write Troops to Teachers for more information at: DANTES, Code 02, 6490 Saufley Field Rd., Pensacola, FL 32508-5243; or telephone, toll-free: 1-800-231-6242.



*William R. Mimiaga, a special education teacher, joins Diane Brown, principal at Stephens Middle School in Long Beach, Calif., during a special ceremony honoring his selection as the California Troops to Teachers 2006 Middle School Teacher of the Year.*

